

IT'S BIGGER THAN ME Series Episode 3: Defending Your Right to Lose Weight

Yvette Nicole Brown and guests are all paid spokespersons for Novo Nordisk Inc.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: I'm Yvette Nicole Brown. Some of you may know me as Shirley from the sitcom Community or from Disney's Disenchanted. And when I'm not acting, you can find me guest co-hosting shows like The Real and The View. But today, I'm here to talk about obesity. We're going to talk specifically about defending your right to lose weight.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And oh, boy, it's a doozy. We're going to dive into deep and often murky water today, friends. And I hope that we can finally get some clarity on this hotly debated topic. And speaking of bringing the heat, I have Ashlee Marie Preston here with me today. Ashlee is an American media personality, journalist, producer, activist and the first trans woman to become editor in chief of a national publication Wear Your Voice magazine.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: She's also the first openly trans person to run for state office in California. Ashlee resides in Los Angeles, where she runs a nonprofit, she founded called You Are Essential that funds grassroots organizations combating food insecurity and housing instability. She believes that in a racist, misogynistic, transphobic, fat-phobic society, the most revolutionary thing she can do is thrive out loud and that she does. Welcome, Ashlee.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Thank you for having me, Yvette. And for that very thorough introduction. I feel so seen.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: You are seen, baby. Also joining us is Dr. Tiffany Lowe Clayton. She's a board-certified family physician of over 20 years and an obesity medicine specialist. Dr. Lowe Clayton has worked in partnership with the CDC and the American Osteopathic Association on health campaigns focused on smoking cessation as well as women's health initiatives at the Women in Journalism Symposium. Welcome Dr. Lowe Clayton.

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Thank you, Yvette. And thank you for hosting this series and for all the work that you've done creating a space where conversations like this can occur.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Thank you both for being here today. So let's dive in, shall we? It is difficult to begin a conversation centered around health without first acknowledging the privilege that I live with, despite the struggles I've had with my weight. I am a black woman, but Ashlee you exist at the intersection of several identities because you are a black trans woman.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: How does that impact the way you view health?

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Well, thank you for that acknowledgment, not just of my identities, but also of my humanity. Real talk, health for me is first and foremost about staying alive, period. That is the reality of being trans in America. We are out here fighting for our lives on the

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daily. Fighting politicians, fighting corporations, and often fighting for the acknowledgment of our very existence.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Navigating the health care system as a trans woman is fraught with anxiety and dread. Do you know how long it took me to find a doctor that I could actually trust?

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: I imagine that must be incredibly difficult to navigate. It's hard and it just shouldn't be. Doctor, what are your thoughts on some of these barriers to access that Ashlee is describing and what can be done about it?

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Well, unfortunately, she's exactly right. It's bigger than just wanting to make a change. It's also about ensuring that patients can find a health care provider that they can trust who will hear their needs and address it in an individualized and compassionate way. And the reality is, for some, it's just not that easy, which can delay their care and contribute to the alarming rate of health disparities that we see.

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: We've made progress over the last several years, but there's still a lot of work that needs to be done, both from a legislative standpoint as well as from a provider standpoint on this front, as it's still a real crisis of care.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Navigating my health around racism, transphobia, and fat-phobia is incredibly complicated. I know I make it look glamorous to be me, but it's exhausting.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Let's talk about glamor for a minute. You are 6-2. When you walk into a room, you are a force, you are magnetic. In a Harper's Bazaar article from 2021, you discuss learning to call a cease fire and embrace your body as ethereal rather than as an enemy. Tell me more about that.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: I was waist deep in the body positive movement at that point and really for the first time, just trying on this idea that maybe nothing needed fixing after all, maybe nothing was wrong. And this is just what I'm working with. I practice radical self-acceptance and it was truly a transformative experience. I embraced the elements of my identity that I spent most of my life working to suppress.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: And yet.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And yet, it's bigger than radical self-acceptance. I mean, you've been really open about the limitations of the body positive movement when it comes to certain health issues. And you've got a lot of public backlash for it, too. So tell us about the health concerns you had that you couldn't positively think your way out of.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Well, my gastric reflux was not deterred by a newfound love of my curves. And then sleep apnea slid into the chat despite my best efforts.

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DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Unfortunately, that kind of snowball effect happens when patients and health care providers alike don't understand obesity as a chronic disease and how it can impact a person's overall health. There are several weight related health conditions, including those that Ashlee just mentioned. But also health conditions such as type two diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease and osteoarthritis.

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: And that's just a few that can all be made worse when a person carries excess weight. So it's important that patients recognize those risk so that they can get the help that they need.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Yes, exactly that. During this time, I felt so defeated and hopeless and like so many others do. I began to eat to cope with my overwhelming feelings. And obviously that just makes it worse. And more health problems came up. I was over 500 pounds and my life and body were completely falling apart.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Was that the push you needed to finally seek medical help?

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Girl, I wish. (laughs) I told you it took me so long to find a doctor that I could trust. Truthfully, I was really conflicted about losing weight. I didn't want the Internet trolls to think that their critiques on fat bodies had any influence on me. And I was also really worried about losing my community if I explored weight loss as an option.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: This is magnified as a black woman. We all see what happens to celebrities online when they choose to lose weight. They get accused of promoting diet culture. Like, what? (laughs)

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: You know, people are too quick to judge and make negative comments online.

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Well, that's why people need a trusted and a trained provider that they can confide in who will take the time to go through all of the complexities that contribute to obesity. We've discussed the many ways that societal, mental, physical and emotional factors combine to produce health outcomes. None of this is produced in a vacuum, and none of it can be fixed in one either.

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Look, no one person is the same, and each person will respond differently to the factors that impact their weight. And the reality is having excess weight or obesity can cause serious health issues, and people deserve to get the help they need without feeling fear of bias or being shamed for wanting to lose weight. A doctor who truly understands obesity and how to treat it can tell you if and what changes would need to be made.

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Part of which goes deeper than diet culture, which isn't always informed. But instead, involves developing healthy eating habits that last as part of a lifelong journey.

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ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: In my case, it was a matter of life and death, and I chose life like I always have and I always will. I choose life. I haven't fought this hard my whole life to be here just to give up now.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Let me tell you what you're not going to do, make me cry, so I'm going right on over here. Go on. Go on, doctor. Go on.

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Well, it's brave to fight for your health. Consider the benefits. Even a weight loss of 5 to 10% of your body weight can produce significant health benefits. Things such as lowering blood pressure or improving your cholesterol or decreasing things like knee pain if you have osteoarthritis.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: You know, and that's what makes the fight worth it, right?

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Yeah. And doctors have so many more tools at their disposal now. So we should never let anybody rob us of the benefits of that life by stigmatizing our desire to lose weight when necessary to improve our health.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Mm, I feel empowered. You know, I want to thank both of you for being here. Ashlee, for being you and being so vulnerable and honest with us today. I have so much to think about after this conversation. And thank you, Dr. Tiffany Lowe Clayton, for always giving us wisdom and caring about all of us. All right. On that beautiful and poignant note, let's play the It's Bigger Than Me Questionnaire.

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Fire away.

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: I'm ready!

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: All right. Okay, Doctor, what do you do for self-care at the end of a long day?

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Well, I love to go on what I call my girl power hours. It's a long walk as I listen to something inspirational. Being outside, it really clears my mind.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: Mm. And, Ashlee, what is your favorite comfort food?

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Well, I'm vegan, and I love anything Italian that is vegan. That's my favorite.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And what? What is your go to response for trolls online?

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: Well, I screengrab their problematic comment or DM, and then I repost it as a teachable moment. I think so often people get keyboard courage and think that

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there are no repercussions for being mean online. I also want people to see what I'm dealing with on the daily and know that it isn't going unnoticed and that I won't be silenced in spite of it.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: You know what? I believe in that too, because it's a great way to hold people accountable, but also hold on to your boundaries. All right, Doctor, what would you consider the number one factor to successful weight management?

DR. TIFFANY LOWE CLAYTON: Understanding that maintaining healthy weight is a lifelong journey, not a finite destination. When you do it, if you decide to do it, do it for yourself. Nobody else.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: And Ashlee?

ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON: I agree with Dr. Lowe Clayton. And further, I'd say you can't compare yourself to anyone else. You are you. You're unique. Let what works for you work for you.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: All right. And there you have it. Thank you so much, ladies. And thank you for taking the time to join us for another episode of the It's Bigger Than Me series. In the meantime, you can find us online at ItsBiggerThan.com and follow us on Instagram @ItsBiggerThan. And if you like what you saw today, share it with your friends or on your socials, then tag us in the comments. We'll see you back here soon. Bye.

YVETTE NICOLE BROWN: It's Bigger Than Me is presented by Novo Nordisk Inc and has become a movement supported by Queen Latifah and thousands of people and companies such as the NFL Alumni, the Media Empathy Foundation and the Obesity Action Coalition, aiming to change the way the world understands talks about and treats obesity.